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## A NEGLECTED AMERICAN POET.\*

BY MONTGOMERY SCHUYLER.

GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND is aware of my desire, after a personal acquaintance with him begun in a newspaper office a full third of a century ago, of making and publishing a review of his work in verse. He has helped me with material which otherwise would scarcely have been accessible to me. And he has made one request, or suggestion, in return, which I am sorry to find impracticable. This is that, whatever I might be moved to say about his literature, I should treat it by itself, and leave on one side the journalism through which he is so much more widely known.

It is impossible to treat his work in verse as quite apart from his work on the press, what he hoped might endure from what he was quite content to see perish after it had served its fugitive turn and boiled the diurnal pot. The two cannot be disjoined. Mr. Townsend's journalism and his literature have rubbed off on each other. Nobody who has followed his newspaper work will be disposed to deny to its author a very high degree of poetical sensibility, and a power of poetical expression often manifested in irrelevant, as well as in merely wasteful, ways. I remember he reported the trial of Tilton against Beecher, in the course of which some old love-letters came to be read, and noted the effect with which the reading fell upon the plaintiff in the suit, who had been one of the parties to the correspondence. According to my distant memory, the notation was something like this: "How like the fog bells on familiar coasts,

\*"Poems." By George Alfred Townsend. Washington, D. C.; Rhodes and Ralph, 1870.

"Tales of the Chesapeake." By George Alfred Townsend ("Gath"). New York: American News Company, 1880.

"Bohemian Days." By George Alfred Townsend ("Gath"). H. Campbell & Co., New York, 1880.

"Poetical Addresses of George Alfred Townsend." Published by E. F. Bonaventure & Co., New York, 1881.

"Poems of Men and Events." By George Alfred Townsend. Gapland Edition. E. F. Bonaventure & Co., New York, 1899.

whence one must steer, though homesick," and so forth. Fancy coming upon such a figure in a newspaper report of a sensational trial in this present year of grace. Thus did poetry rub off on newspaper work. And that the converse has happened, and how and how far it has happened, it seems desirable to show, in the interest of the poetry itself. Mr. Townsend seems to me a genuine poet, who comes as near to being spokesman in verse for his own generation as any one our country has produced, a faithful interpreter of what it is that the general, promiscuous mass of the American people "wishes to say." The work itself seems to me, at its best, to have done something of the same service for the workman's countrymen as Kipling has done for his countrymen of Greater Britain. That, while the one spokesman is world-famous, as he deserves to be, the other should be so extensively unknown in his true capacity that this article may be, to a majority of its readers, perhaps the first announcement that there is such a poet at all—this strikes me as absurd. And, evidently, there must be some other explanation of it than that the American people does not desire to be spoken for, or would not know when it was spoken for, if pains had been taken to bring the fact to its attention.

In the first place, it may or may not be characteristically "journalistic," but it seems to be the fact, that Townsend's poems have never been, properly speaking, "published." A glance over the titles makes this plain. The "Poems" of 1870, containing perhaps the most careful and deliberate of his work in verse, was set forth by a firm of which I never heard until I saw its name on the title-page, and the book itself has been so long out of print that it was only by much rummaging in second-hand book shops that I was able to procure a copy for the present purpose. The other volumes on the list were issued in forms and ways that seemed to label them as ephemera, excepting only the latest. This is a handsome and goodly volume, which constitutes, we find, the author's own poetical "claim." But the title, "Poems of Men and Events," does not define the claim, and gives the notion of something, or of a collection of somethings, rather "light and occasional" than "more serious and deliberate." And then, also, the make-up of the book, the pictures of the author's parents and of his birth-place and of his dwelling-place, and even of the tomb he has built for himself, presuppose a personal interest in the writer on the part of the reader, and seem to amount to an express

renunciation of the wider public, to warn the "general reader," as it were, that the book is not meant for the like of him.

Besides, printing, in these days, by no means wholly constitutes "publication." That involves printing under such conditions as shall induce or compel "noticing." This is especially essential to any real publication of the poems of a newspaper man. "The small peccary band" are by no means given to hailing with delight the efforts of one of their own number in ways more ambitious than the regular employments of the herd, and there is strong and general disbelief, in strictly "literary" circles, that any literary good can come out of the newspaper Nazareth.

But, granting and allowing for the particular ineptitude which Mr. Townsend has shown for "publication" as distinct from publicity, and for the scepticism of the Brahmins, one has to own that there is much in the work itself to justify this scepticism. "Although the newspapers have been my bulrushes, holding me up," says the author, in his prose preface, by one of those quaint and happy images that occur to him so readily, "Poesy has been Pharaoh's daughter, raising me." But something more than the poetic impulse is needed for the production of poetry, and that is the poetic art. It is the patient clarification and elaboration of the poetic material. What Emerson said about Thoreau, and might often have said about himself, we have often to say about Townsend: "The thyme and marjoram are not yet honey." Even to good prose a higher elaboration is essential than the conditions of the newspaper admit. There is a curious letter from Philip Francis in Burke's "Correspondence," curious, among other things, for the light it may shed upon the "Junius" controversy, though I have never seen it cited in connection with that controversy. The arrogant, schoolmasterly tone which the lesser man takes to the greater would have been the height of insolence viewed in the light of the respective "public forms" of the two writers; but supposing Francis to have been conscious of a great, though anonymous, literary success, it becomes quite intelligible. "Once for all," comments the putative author of "Junius" upon the manuscript of the "Reflections," "once for all, I wish you would let me teach you to write English. To me, who am to read everything you write, it would be a great comfort, and to you no sort of disparagement. Why will you not allow yourself to be persuaded that polish is material to preservation?" The fact that

Burke has come down to us "sustained by his matter," while the dust settles upon the forgotten controversies which "Junius" fancied would be kept in memory by his style, does not affect the soundness of the proposition. And, if even this degree of "polish" is incompatible with the methods of the newspaper, especially with the methods of so particularly profuse an improvisatore for the newspaper as Mr. Townsend, much more, of course, is the higher degree of it that is "material" to the production of durable verse. The "journalistic" method of work has been described somewhere by Carlyle: "No carpenter ever made a mathematically right angle in the world; but every carpenter knows when it is right enough, and does not botch his job and lose his wages by trying to get it too right." The poetic method is that which has been so memorably described by Tennyson:

"Old poets, fostered under friendlier skies,  
 Old Virgil, who would write ten lines, they say,  
 At dawn, and lavish all the golden day  
 To make them wealthier in his readers' eyes;  
 And you, old popular Horace, you the wise  
 Adviser of the nine-years-pondered lay."

For a journalist to undertake literature, most of all for him to undertake poetry, is to undertake to keep these two methods apart, to pass from one to the other. And that is perhaps one of the chief reasons why, with so many young men joining the press, as they used to do in this country more than as they do now, because they felt or fancied in themselves a vocation to literature, so little literature has been produced by journalists, and why the men who have kept and fulfilled their literary aspirations have, for the most part, found it necessary to cut loose from what Mr. Townsend himself calls "the daily domineerer." It requires almost a miracle of intellectual balance and moral firmness to keep clear of the temptation to "make copy" when you set out to make literature. Perhaps the most conspicuously successful example of resistance to this temptation is that of Mr. Andrew Lang, who still, at fifty-odd, seems to keep his journalism and his literature well apart. On his journalistic side, Mr. Lang may be described, as Thackeray described himself under the figure of Pendennis, as a hack naturally fast in pace and brilliant in action; and to pass from even such hack-work as his to the sonnet on the *Odyssey* is a feat, quite and far away Mr. Lang's high-

water mark though the sonnet on the *Odyssey* be. It may, indeed, almost be said that the professional producer of ephemera who desires also to produce something more than ephemera must take to himself the saying of Spinoza, to whom Mr. Townsend has addressed two admiring sonnets, that he "will earn his living with his hands and keep his brains for himself."

It can by no means be said of the latest volume of Townsend's poems that it always observes this distinction. And it is noticeable that the poems in which it is most carefully observed are not the latest; are more apt to be the earliest. In fact, the most careful and elaborate work, that in which the writer's craftsmanship comes uniformly nearest to artistry, is, as has been suggested already, the first volume, the "Poems" of 1870. "Finished to the finger-nail," as is much of the verse in "*Tales of the Chesapeake*," and at least the "*Little Grisette*" in the "*Bohemian Days*," the poet seems to show a progressive carelessness respecting form. It is true that there is a corresponding gain in substance, in the evidence of experience, but this, though it be a compensation, is scarcely to be pleaded as an offset. The iron has entered his soul. Much of this impression is doubtless due to the circumstances in which this latest volume was issued, to the temptation to which the poet has yielded of "making copy." The poetical idea is very seldom absent—that is to say, an interesting idea that of itself suggests embodiment in verse rather than in prose—but the author seems satisfied with a rougher and readier notation of it than would have satisfied him once. There are, among the hundred and twenty-odd "*Poems of Men and Events*," scarcely a dozen that the reader would be content to miss, but there are scarcely more than that, of the newer work, that could not and should not have been made better. If, on almost every page, there is some vivid felicity of imagery or expression, there are few pages that are not marred by some blemish. Rhythm and even grammar are disregarded by the running pen, until sometimes one would be tempted to say that the author had no ear for the music of verse, if there were not sure presently to occur some line or lines that made that supposition untenable, and threw the reader back upon the impregnable ground of the vicar of Wakefield, that the picture would have been better if the painter had taken more pains. A year's work with a file, how much good it would have done this volume;—if the author, to use his own better image, had patiently clarified his work,

"And purled away its sediment."

But he seems to show an ineptitude for self-criticism, or an impatience of it, equal to his ineptitude in respect to "publication." That this should be shown in his selection of his own works was to be expected. Poets are almost foredoomed to failure in this, almost sure to be guided by other than critical considerations, largely by a fatuous fondness for their latest born, even though Benjamin should turn out deformed or perverse. The most unfriendly critic of Mr. Swinburne could not have made a less favorable selection than the poet's own. Almost the only satisfactory abridgment of a poet's work by himself is that of Matthew Arnold, and it is open to anybody to say that that is because in this case the critical faculty tends to overpower the creative, and that if the selection had not been so good, the poetry might have been better. In any case, it seems that Townsend's poems stand in need of being edited as well as of being published.

Thus far, I seem to have been dealing in nothing but negatives; but when such a poet as Mr. Townsend, to my sense, is, in question, it seems needful to clear away the impediments and obstructions which have prevented his more general recognition, if we would reconcile his poetical performance with the appreciation of the American public. Of course, you cannot "prove" poetry. You can only show it. And the lover of poetry has only to glance over the pages of this latest volume, better as, I admit and insist, the poet might have made it, to come upon lines and phrases which only a poet could have written. Here is one, from the lines upon "Gail Hamilton's" book on Blaine:

"This book it also is thy tomb;  
Two women watched it, one to doom,  
A light of Marys fills its gloom."

And here, from the verses on Gibbon:

"The vast procession of mankind,  
Like some great circus seemed,  
In his kaleidoscopic mind  
Metempsychosed or dreamed."

Or, in a more conventional and academic strain, these concluding lines from a sonnet to John Sherman:

"And seem to talk to Nestor in his calm,  
When Homer knew him in the vale of years."

And here is the last verse from the poem "At Ayr," marred as it is by the rhyme which is rhyme only to the eye. While "letters" undoubtedly rhymes to "debtors," "belles-lettres" as certainly does not, any more than "*la belle alliance*" rhymes to "defiance," as it purports to do in the sonnet on Byron. Of course, I quote the verse, not for the blemish, but in spite of it, and because it both recalls Burns, being even, by design or luck, in the metre of the "Epistle to a Young Friend," and characterizes the American as well as the Scottish bard:

"Great babe! who haled thy Scottish sect  
 And put its saints thy debtors,  
 And made thy wayside dialect  
 A language of belles-lettres!  
 I do not kneel, but bow thy due,  
 Ent'ring thy hut's low portal;  
 The unsevere see Nature through  
 The joyous troll immortal."

But if these felicities are frequent in the later poems, they are seldom long sustained; and to see what the poet can do and has done upon the continuous high level of artistic workmanship proper and indispensable to lasting verse, one has to revert to the earlier, almost to the earliest. It was at the funeral of James Buchanan in 1868, which I attended as the "representative" of my newspaper, and Mr. Townsend in his capacity of free lance, that he borrowed a buggy and drove me about the sweet and cheerful Pennsylvanian country that surrounds "Wheatlands" and quaint, steep-gabled, pleasant old Lancaster, and recited to me a poem then still, I think, unprinted. When I came into possession the other day of the "Poems" of 1870, and for the first time found the poem in print, after recent study of the alternating amenities and asperities of the later verse, the reader can imagine the mixture of curiosity and trepidation with which I turned to it first, and the delight of finding that it had not shrunk, but lived up to and filled out the vague impression of it that had abided with me for thirty-one years. The reader shall judge for himself whether my admiration was misplaced. The title of the poem is "Paul on the Hellespont":

"From Japhet, when Shem was a yeoman,  
 And Canaan reviled,  
 Till to-day, when the world is all Roman,  
 And Judah a wild,



By the verge of this sea  
There was never a beggar like me.

"The Kings of all Asia beside me  
    Arise in their might;  
Their banners and galleys deride me,  
    Their camps blaze with light;  
I am footsore and tried,  
And the ferry is stormy and wide.

"My purse it is rent like my raiment;  
    My soldiers are two;  
For the ferryman, Heaven be his payment!  
    My tent, Heaven's blue!  
But the conquests we seek  
Are the glorified lands of the Greek.

"They are wisest and purest of races,  
    The Lords of the Arts.  
Like the statues of gods are their faces;  
    We aim at their hearts;  
All our art is a cross,  
And our gospel but sorrow and loss.

"But our tongues they are laden with wonder;  
    Our pains shall be sweet;  
Lord Christ, who has walked on the thunder,  
    Will buoy our feet;  
On the mountain of Mars  
We shall plead by our stake with His scars.

"Where the marbles of Phidias whiten  
    The temples of Jove,  
The image they ravished shall brighten  
    The isles with His love;  
All their lore be His shame,  
And the Cæsars shall rule in His name.

"To His birthplace shall stroll for His glory  
    Philosophy hoar;  
Architecture shall sculpture His story  
    And plant, to adore,  
In the Parthenon's eaves  
The cross that was set between thieves.

"My brethren, perhaps in that vision,  
    On earth, as in bliss,  
The Gentiles may place, for this mission,  
    Our faces by His!  
Oh! I weary to wait.  
Lo! a sail. Let us pass o'er the strait."

It is difficult—to me it is impossible—to make a formula that will include the whole body of Mr. Townsend's poetic work. The

difficulty of the critic is the same as that which the articulator in Dickens encountered in the presence of the unassorted and unassortable osseous remains which he dismissed in despair as "human various." This is a poetical "various," in which the variety comes too near to miscellany to admit of an easy classification. The title of this article designates the most important, in quantity and perhaps upon the whole in quality, of his poetical performance. He is not only an American poet, but if I had the courage of my perceptions I should not hesitate to change the indefinite to the definite article and to call him the American poet of the generation which grew up with the new national self-consciousness developed by the Civil War. "The competition is not exacting." In the previous generation the aspiration of our singers was that of Keats, to "be numbered with the English poets," and so, in the measure of their success, they were. In spite of the poems on slavery and of the "Hiawatha," Longfellow remained a scholar and gentleman quite after the English pattern. In spite of the poems on slavery, and even of the noble Harvard ode, Lowell, except in his dialect verse, remained the same, or at most a gentleman and scholar of Greater Britain. If one cannot say the same of Whittier, that is because he would have made the impression upon the cultivated and conventional Briton of a "dissenting minister." The Americanism of Emerson is not more clear than the aloofness and ethereality that kept him from being the real spokesman of his people. As for Walt Whitman, who expressed for the poetical methods of all these an equal and lofty contempt, and who proceeded to celebrate "these States" by the modes of cataloguing and ejaculation, it takes less courage now than it would have taken ten, or, still more, twenty years ago, to say that in Walt's own poetical method there was not only a huge deal of laziness and conceit, but also an appreciable element of "foxiness" bordering on fraudulency. As no poet is less consciously imitative than Townsend, it is all the more interesting to note coincidences between him and his predecessors. The long poem, "Palos," in this latest volume, must recall Lowell to many readers. In detail the resemblance is sometimes startling:

"For no new world Columbus sought;  
Embargoed Ind he hoped to clutch;  
His aptness grasped the spheroid thought  
And knew extremes did somewhere touch.

"There is a mean amidst extremes,  
 There is a halfway happiness;  
 Between the continents he dreams  
 The lost Atlantis lay to bless."

If this be Lowell, we have to own that it is Lowell at very near his very best. The prefatory poem, again, the "Birthday Thoughts," recalls Emerson in its Orphic curtness, and what reader would hesitate to identify the Sage of Concord in such a passage as this?—

"Flowing from Lionel's brain cells  
 And from the menstruum of the wells;  
 Earth's drip from out her cavern chasm  
 And waste of parent protoplasm,  
 The saturation of life's plant  
 And spill of Pluto's adamant."

Let me repeat that I have not the least notion that Lowell was present to Mr. Townsend's consciousness, or even to his "sub-consciousness," when he was writing "Palos," or Emerson when he was writing "Yertes's Spring." I cite the coincidences to show how difficult, from the critical formulist's point of view, this poetical "various" is. For, if we are going to construe resemblances into imitations, conscious or unconscious, what are we to make of still another stop which is drawn out of the poetical organ in "The First Hunger," which I suppose most readers would ascribe, without much hesitation, to Mr. Kipling?—

"The apples are water, dearest,  
 The dates are only sweet;  
 There is no flesh in the juice of the grape,  
 Nor life in the berry we eat!  
 In the blood of the kid we have slain,  
 In our new and terrible greed,  
 Lie the gristle and marrow we need,—  
 In the pitiful yield of the grain,—  
 The barley that beards the wild rain,  
 The corn that the crow contests,  
 The milk in the white wheat's breasts,—  
 Behold my red hands as I speak,  
 And the curse of the sweat on my cheek!"

And yet it is on the one hand in the last degree improbable that Mr. Kipling ever saw these lines, and certain, on the other, that they were published the year he was born. Nevertheless, this last parallel, unlike the others we have been noting, instead of being a mere superficial or casual resemblance, does denote a real

analogy. That insistent and compelling rhythm which makes the audience, whether of the barrack-room or the music hall or the library or the cloister, "sit up" when the Greater Briton strikes up "'is bloomin' lyre," has sent his verses round the world, while the American has not yet found what can be called a hearing at home. This seizing tunefulness of the younger poet is a gift which the elder does not share in any eminent degree. There is no help for that. But also Kipling shows the constant attention to form, the want of which in Townsend we have been deploring. This difference seems to vindicate the wisdom of the one in breaking loose at the earliest moment from "the daily domineerer," while his continued servitude to it has been visited upon the other. Townsend's own

"Dear, far convenient Day,  
With bread and heart, and love and work concurring,"

never comes unless it is made to come. But in the qualities of alertness and aliveness and impressibleness, there is by no means so much to choose, while the general attitude of the two poets toward life is very much the same. There is this necessary and national difference, that the audacities of the American are and seem much less like defiances than those of the Briton. There are huge temerities in Townsend, as may be seen in "The Politicians' Christmas, A. D. 1," and in passages of "Palos," though they are directed rather toward theological than toward sexual conventions; but there is seldom evidence of the intention of startling the reader. We call Kipling "American" partly for his temerities, but he is doubtless more conscious of them as temerities than he would be if he were by birth an American. An Englishman, even a Greater Briton, has always the consciousness of his caste, and if he ignores it, he does so in cold blood. The British Brahman who becomes a Bohemian becomes an Adullamite, whereas the luckier American has no caste to abandon or convention to defy. It is his birthright that the assertion of equality, even that familiarity, does not involve disrespect. American nativity is a freemasonry which might almost take for a national motto the old Masonic verse:

"We meet upon the Level and we part upon the Square."

The nationality, which is in one case an "imperialism," is as intense in the one as in the other. Townsend is as devout a

believer in the "manifest destiny" of the United States as Kipling in that of the British Empire. In neither case can an excessive scrupulosity as to means go with this outreaching spirit. In "Irving at Burr's Trial," we find Townsend condoning and even pooh-poohing "The Crime of Aaron Burr," in his attempt at Southwestern empire, just as we might expect to find Kipling condoning and even pooh-poohing any little irregularities that Mr. Cecil Rhodes might find it convenient to commit, at the expense of Boers or "natives," in the extension of British South Africa.

This same poem is an example of a large and important part of Mr. Townsend's poetical work. No man has explored more faithfully the annals of the colonies and of the early Republic in search of merely human traits. No wonder that such a quest should lead the searcher into the byways rather than along the highways of history, that his work of this kind in newspaper prose should have been disparaged as "historic gossip." Never mind. It is more to the purpose that he should have attained and become able to impart a more vivid view of our historical "worthies" and unworthies than I, at least, know where else to find, from the strife of Dutch and Swedes for the possession of the Delaware in the seventeenth century down to our own day. All these things, various as is the effectiveness with which they are presented, sometimes with brilliant success, sometimes with flat failure, are presented in the poetic form of "views," in the poetic-journalistic form of kodak-views, and not in the historical form of documented and verifiable "estimates." But how realized and realizable are the best-taken and best-developed of the views, from the little picture of "Far Virginia," in the year of "Blenheim's Victory" and of Mary Washington's birth in "Mary Washington," to the Roentgen-ray psychology of "Ulysses S. Grant, March 4, 1869,"—the soliloquy of the simple, dazed soldier confronting the Presidency and staring into the unknown. Even "Salt River," the legendary destination of defeated candidates for the Presidency, is, not photographed this time, but poetized, and populated with the shades of the defeated and departed, from the victor of Saratoga,

"The oldest exile on the silent tides,"

down to

"Young McClellan, Hamlet of the crowd,"

until it recalls the banks of Acheron and the spectral bodies of

magnanimous heroes besieging the squalid ferryman. One abatement, it seems, there may be to be made from the trustworthiness of the historical camera, and that by reason of the personality of the operator, as a native of the "Eastern Shore" and inheritor of its prejudices against the Virginian politicians of the young century. But this does not affect the vividness of the presentation, as in this sketch of "Monroe, the Last Virginia Chief":

"He was a politician's flower, raised from a common weed,  
Fit for no enterprise in life but following to lead;  
To watch the great and imitate, to listen and succeed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"His Western States he never loved marched o'er his mountain's bar,  
On roads he vetoed, to his forts made for defensive war:  
Free millions flout o'er Africa the faint Monrovia star."

The unquestioning belief in the future of one's country which does not tend to cultivate political scrupulosity, no more tends to cultivate appreciation, or even tolerance, of political criticism or of political critics. Everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, and whoever prophesies evil or points out dangers might better be engaged in helping on "the movement." In "Palos" our poet sings, not very poetically:

"It is the Public Spirit's token  
To wish all things constructive well."

And is not that an expression of the general American spirit, and especially of the spirit of the West, which the poet takes to be specifically the American spirit? In the poem on Burr, already cited, he makes Irving prophesy:

"Yon golden West will govern, in its prime,  
With mildness known not to old colonies  
Ripped from the civil wars and Bible-cracked."

But the most elaborate and the most striking expression of this phase of the American spirit is the poem which ought to be called "Bohemian and Sadducee."

"The Editor and Writer met in Twilight's lonely lane,  
Bohemian and Sadducee enforced to meet again;  
'When next we walk, successful friend! the darkness will be deep,'  
Said the Bohemian; 'Tell me, now, what have you done to keep?'"

"My self-esteem, my spotless work, my influence austere!  
I edited the Higher Thought, the economic seer!  
Never to error did I stoop, and when the State must fall,  
Let History consult my files; I did predict it all."

\* \* \* \* \*

"'One drop,' the old Bohemian said, 'within its channel strong,  
I mingle in the mighty tide and with it move along.  
I have no other creed than this, no power of my own:  
Flow, beauteous river! Not in thee have ever I thrown a stone!'

"From Twilight lane they parted last, the years were growing dark;  
Neither upon the century left more than finger-mark.  
'Silentium!' was the epitaph upon the scolding man,  
But all the bands of music play past the Bohemian."

If this be immensely characteristic of the poet, is it not as characteristic of the people whose spokesman he aspires to be? The belief, unquestioning and impatient of question, in the United States of America, which rises to the level and so often takes the place of a religious faith, is in the blood of all of us. I know no more eloquent expression than Townsend at his best has given to it, and none so concrete and popular. Nor is his optimism attained by blinking unpleasant facts. Like all the rest of us, he glories in the career of Lincoln as the most typically American thing we have yet done. Everybody remembers Lowell's eulogy in the Harvard Ode. But that sculptural figure was not Lincoln "in his habit as he lived." In "Wild Cat Junction," one of the poems I most miss from this latest volume, Townsend has shown that the ideal Lincoln can be kept in spite of the most unshrinking realism. No Western novelist has given so awful a picture of the crudity and squalor of the prairie environment in which Lincoln was reared. The realism is so unshrinking that I shrink from reproducing it, but I must give the last and not the toughest verse of it to show over what it is that his idealism has triumphed:

"Corn-dodgers dipped in maple juice he ate with thankfulness;  
An ox-steak when the preacher came the family to bless;  
Rye coffee, with molasses sweet (he never used a fork,  
But with his knife, ten months a year, poked down the salted pork).

"Still, like old Bunyan's vision, seen o'er Bedford Prison's gate,  
He saw out of this poverty the highways of the State;  
The pilgrimage of Christendom from bondage to the light,  
And Slavery's pack fall from the back of lands that seek the right.

"Husks filled his belly, but he saw his father's house afar.  
A shepherd on a lonely moor, he watched the Master's star.  
And not by dainty hands in kid the shackles fell to rust,  
But warty, horny, were the palms that made the nation just.

"Still, in his homely Hoosier phrase, he talked the armies on.  
The same old puckered face looked out, Columbus-like, for dawn.  
We waited for some courtly Christ to draw the sting from death,  
And, lo, the promised man arose in lowly Nazareth!"

It seems to me that this portrait is worthier of the national Pantheon than any ideal figure that has been made, or that is likely to be made. And years later, the artist, in a poem, "Commander Lincoln," read before the Society of the Army of the Potomac, took up the theme again, and in a more oratorical strain pointed the moral for Lincoln's country of Lincoln's career :

"Deep the wells of humble childhood, cool the springs beside the hut,  
Millions more as poor as Lincoln see the door he has not shut.  
Not till wealth has made its canker every poor white's cabin through  
Shall the Great Republic wither, or the infidel subdue!

"Stand around your great commander, lay aside your little fears!  
Every Lincoln carries freedom's car along a hundred years.  
And when next the call for soldiers rolls along the golden belt,  
Look to see a mightier column rise and march, prevail and melt!"

Is not that what the American people "wish to say"? Has any one else said it for them more impressively or more memorably? Is not the author of these lines as near to being a national spokesman in verse as any in this generation of his countrymen? Whether or not the reader agrees that this thesis is made out by the citations that have been given, I do not see how the attentive and considerate reader can fail to agree that Townsend's verse deserves more attention and consideration than it has received; and to diffuse that belief as widely as possible is the object of these citations and remarks. I can quite imagine such a reader demurring that the adjective of my title has been better made out than the substantive, the Americanism of the poet than his specifically poetical power, and even adding, if he be of a sarcastic turn, that fine lines do not make fine poems, and that the most eloquent stump speeches in verse do not make a great poet. The epithet is not mine, and in any case is not of a scientific exactness. What I claim for Mr. Townsend is that he is an interesting and remarkable poet. But it is also true that he has shown the capacity to deal with themes more deeply and broadly human than those of politics or even of patriotism, and to give them artistic expression. Not to speak of earlier work, "Her First Glasses" and "In Rama," in the present volume, seem to me sufficiently to show it. The former is almost too intimate to be quoted here. It will recall Cowper's "My Mary" to reading readers, but it seems to me of an even more poignant pathos, which even the quaint and homely adverbial use of "some" does not seem to blunt, seems al-



most to sharpen. "In Rama" is a threnody which gives a personal expression to a sentiment as general as humanity:

"A little face there was,  
When all her pains were done,  
Beside that face I loved:  
They said it was a son.  
A son to me—how strange—  
Who never was a man;  
But lived, from change to change,  
A boy, as I began."

Our poet's best work, most feeling and most artistic, in that description suffused with sentiment which is the staple of the poetry of the English language in the nineteenth century, is doubtless that which he has done in the poems descriptive and reminiscent of the region of his birth and boyhood, the "Eastern Shore." I wish he had retained the pretty "Chester River":

"Wise is the wild duck winging straight to thee,  
River of summer! from the cold Arctic sea,  
Coming, like his fathers for centuries, to seek  
The sweet, salt pastures of the far Chesapeake."

But he has retained the "Land of Pocomoke" and "Old St. Mary's," and these furnish a test of his quality in this kind. Here are two verses from the former:

"Is it Snow Hill that greets me back  
To this old loamy cul-de-sac?  
Spread on the level river shore,  
Beneath the bending willow trees  
And speckled trunks of sycamore,  
All moist with airs of rival seas?  
Are these old men who gravely bow,  
As if a stranger all awoke,  
The same who heard my parents' vow—  
Ah, well! in simpler days than now—  
To love and serve by Pocomoke?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"When we have raged our little part,  
And weary out of strife and art,  
Oh! could we bring to these still shores  
The peace they have who harbor here,  
And rest upon our echoing oars,  
And float adown this tranquil sphere,  
Then might yon stars shine down on me,  
With all the hope those lovers spoke,  
Who walked these tranquil streets I see  
And thought God's love nowhere so free,  
Nor life so good, as Pocomoke."

The poem on "Old St. Mary's," the colonial capital of Maryland, is in the same strain of tender reminiscence. But I must be allowed to quote a passage from it, because it seems to me, as a matter of artistic workmanship, in its musical expression of melancholy, quite the summit of its author's attainment:

"Lo! all composed, the soft horizons lie  
 Afloat upon the blueness of their coves,  
 And sometimes in the mirage does the sky  
 Seem to continue the dependent groves,  
 And draw in the canoe that careless roves  
 Among the stars repeated round the bow.  
 Far off the larger sails go down the world,  
 For nothing worldly sees St. Mary's now;  
 The ancient windmills all their sails have furled,  
 The standards of the Lords of Baltimore,  
 And they, the Lords, have passed to their repose;  
 And nothing sounds upon the pebbly shore  
 Except thy hidden bell, Saint Inigo's."

But if this elegiac, this idyllic strain, is heard too rarely here, the elegies and the idylls are themselves but episodes in this hurly-burly of "Men and Events." Tyrtæus sometimes chose the Dorian mood,

"The Dorian mood,  
 Of flutes and soft recorders;"

but the Dorian mood is not Tyrtæan. Our journalistic "*doyen*" is also a journalistic Tyrtæus. The avid curiosity, the vivid glances of insight, the ready, so often too ready, phrase that attests the curiosity and reproduces the vision seen by flashlight, the invincible optimism, the "youthful, vehement, exultant and progressive nationality," these are the dominant strains in this pell-mell of poetic work. Our "*doyen*," by rights and precedents a melancholy and discouraged "sage," appears in these pages as the bugler boy at the head of the column. The twinkling guidon is sometimes hidden in the whiffs of dust. The bugle notes are often jangled in the jolting of the trot, but audible above the "drums and tramlings" of the procession, always giving out, in blithe and cheery tones, the marching orders of the day. Doubtless it is "journalistic," but I think it is fine, and I am sure it is American.

MONTGOMERY SCHUYLER.